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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on teachers' work in western Canadian communities that have substantial populations of Aboriginal students. It highlights the expectations, conditions, and activities that accompany the work in which teachers engage as a direct response to the needs and concerns of diverse Aboriginal communities, examining ways in which teachers can contribute to or impede positive educational change in these communities and discussing the implications of these expectations and relationships for an understanding of teachers' work. The paper begins by examining teaching as a contradictory form of work in which teachers' contributions to the general development and regulation of others are mediated by the regulation of teaching itself. Next, it presents a brief overview of the historical and contemporary community contexts in which Aboriginal education is situated. This is followed by a discussion of key substantive dimensions associated with teaching in these communities. The next section examines the need for more teachers of Aboriginal ancestry at all levels in the education system. After looking at curricular issues and resource support for culturally relevant education, the paper describes relationships among Aboriginal and conventional approaches to education. (Contains 60 references.) (SM)

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Teachers' Work in Canadian Aboriginal Communities

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Introduction

Canada's Aboriginal people have identified education as a critical component in their related struggles to gain meaningful participation in mainstream social, economic and political structures and to pursue effective forms of self-determination. Aboriginal people collectively rank well below national averages on nearly all major indicators of personal and social well-being, including education, employment, income, and health care status, while they experience persistent related problems such as disproportionately high incidences of poverty, involvement with the criminal justice system, and substandard living conditions (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The significance of the education gap between Aboriginal people and the rest of the population is especially profound in an environment in which governments, employers and individuals place growing importance on the attainment of formal educational credentials as determinants of personal and collective success.

Teachers perform a central role as gatekeepers in Aboriginal people's quest to overcome the harsh legacy of colonization and proceed towards fulfillment of their educational ambitions. The actions and character of the teaching force are open to extensive scrutiny since teachers are looked upon to foster positive change even as they are often complicit in processes that have contributed to the denial of educational opportunities to Aboriginal people.

These paradoxical aspects of teachers' roles mirror contradictions that are fundamental to teaching in general. A recurrent theme in the analysis of the occupation, from a variety of perspectives, emphasizes the marginal or paradoxical status that teaching and teachers hold in schools, communities, and employment circumstances (see, e.g., Waller, 1965: 49; Lortie, 1975: 10; Warburton, 1986; Wotherspoon, 1998: 104-105). Teachers are accorded high degrees of public faith as professional educators, but they are also regarded with suspicion and hostility from many quarters. In Canada, public school teachers, their unions and the systems they work in have become frequent targets of governments seeking to constrain public expenditures, reorganize state services, and limit the autonomy of public sector employees (Ungerleider, 1993; Robertson and Smaller, 1996). The prominence given to debates over state funding priorities and accountability, the quality of education, demands for standards-based educational reform, and wider issues related to childhood and youth, has further intensified the pressures that teachers are confronted with in the schools and

communities in which they work. The dynamics of educational change carry with them prospects to reshape teaching both generally and within specific institutional and social contexts. Teaching in cross-cultural settings is most commonly analyzed in conjunction with factors related to pedagogy, empowerment, cultural differences, or teacher training (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Henry, Tator, Mattis, and Rees, 2000: 233ff.). Less attention has been paid to the ways in which these elements interact within the complex workplaces that schools represent as the sites in which teachers' labour is performed (McLaughlin, 1993: 81).

This paper is concerned with how teaching is constituted, and experienced by its practitioners, as a distinct form of work, focusing on teachers' work in communities that have substantial populations of Aboriginal students. Although significant for an analysis of the occupation as a whole, its particular emphasis is to provide the conceptual framework for an understanding of issues that are important in the day to day lives and occupational concerns of teachers working in Aboriginal communities. Three inter-related questions guide this analysis:

(1) What expectations, conditions and activities accompany the work that teachers engage in as a direct response to the needs and concerns of the diverse Aboriginal communities they work in?
(2) What are the ways in which teachers can and do contribute to or impede positive educational change in those community settings?, and
(3) What are the implications of these expectations and relationships for an understanding of teachers' work?

This paper, as part of a broader study intended to examine how teachers working with Aboriginal communities in western Canada experience, interpret, and respond to key features of their working lives, addresses some of the important dimensions of these relationships. First, teaching is posed as a contradictory form of work in which teachers' contributions to the general development and regulation of others are mediated by the regulation of teaching itself. Second, there follows a brief overview of the historical and contemporary community backgrounds in which Aboriginal education is situated, prior to a discussion of key substantive dimensions associated with teaching in these communities.

The Contradictory Character of Teaching

Teachers who work in Aboriginal communities, as in other cross-cultural teaching situations, encounter a diverse range of circumstances and challenges. Before examining specific aspects of Aboriginal educational settings, it is important to understand issues related to teachers' work more generally, paying special attention to the sources of uncertainty frequently associated with teaching.

The ambivalence that surrounds teachers' work is reflected most strongly in debates over the extent to which recent changes to teaching are manifestations of either professionalization or intensification. The former is concerned with how sufficiently teaching has attained levels of autonomy, expertise and influence necessary to influence the development of learning-oriented, credential-dependent societies. Diverse elements of teachers' work are reflected in competing models of professionalism organized around either expert-oriented or empathy-centered images of the occupation (Louis and Smith, 1990). By contrast, there is considerable evidence to suggest that the occupation is being deprofessionalized through recent policy interventions and educational restructuring initiatives that, in important respects, have stripped teachers of their autonomy and discretion (Hargreaves, 1994; Neave, 1992). As teachers take on additional duties without appropriate support resources, their work is also subject to intensification, a process that may even be advanced through ideologies of professionalism that give them a false sense of their impact on educational processes (Apple, 1986). The dynamics associated with struggles for control and professionalization within teaching are further complicated by complex gender relations that accompany teaching as a highly feminized and gender-stratified occupation (Acker, 1999). Teachers' workloads and duties often vary according to their place in the educational hierarchy and the conditions associated with specific schools and districts (Johnson, 1990).

These tensions are evident in teachers' accounts of their own work. Teachers are highly conscious of how increasing curricular and extra-curricular demands, lack of preparation time, and other pressures are intensifying their workdays, and express frustration at their lack of input into educational policy. Teachers are well aware of the impact of public spending restraint on education, and high profile attacks on both their work and the education systems they work in, especially as these stand in marked contrast to recurrent proclamations about education's increasing social importance in a

globally competitive world. Nonetheless, teachers also tend to convey satisfaction with crucial professional aspects of their work, such as the contributions they make to individuals' social and intellectual development, their relative freedom to arrange and present curricular materials, and their advocacy of social and educational issues that promote children's well-being (King and Peart, 1992; Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 1995).

The conflicting forces that characterize teaching are grounded in the nature of teaching as an occupation whose practitioners work within specific material conditions. Teaching is a contradictory form of work oriented to the (re)production of human beings as citizens, labourers, and social subjects. Consequently, struggles to shape and control teaching take place over two distinct but overlapping dimensions associated with technical and moral/subjective relations that are central to teaching/learning processes (Wotherspoon, 1995: 121; Apple, 1986). Teaching involves **technical** operations insofar as its practitioners arrange curricula, organize and deliver lesson plans, maintain student records, and perform other definable functions in the course of their work. At the same time, like work in other social settings, teaching also involves interpersonal relations. More pointedly, teaching is defined to a large extent by its role as a caring or nurturing occupation organized around issues of discipline, moral regulation, and character formation. The **moral or subjective** aspects of teaching arise through teachers' intertwined roles as guardians, mentors, and evaluators of conduct as well as of content.

Teaching shares many characteristics with other occupations, but its uniqueness as a work form is shaped by interactions among these overlapping dynamics. All of these relations take on distinct characteristics within particular material circumstances. Scrutiny of teachers' character and moral standing have been constant elements throughout the history of public schooling. Nonetheless, expected standards of conduct and the way they have been enforced have shifted depending on such factors as supply and demand in the teaching labour market, public climates regarding the treatment of children and families, and general economic conditions (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993; Wotherspoon, 1993). Similarly, while technical aspects of teaching like lesson planning and delivery, marking, and hallway monitoring are relatively enduring tasks, the nature and extent of teachers' duties in a wide range of areas is subject to considerable variation and often contestation under distinct physical, temporal and educational settings. Professional autonomy becomes possible insofar as teachers are entrusted to plan and carry out social and curricular relations in their work settings, but their

discretionary ability is always tempered with varying levels of external constraint and monitoring mechanisms by employers and members of the communities they work in.

In their employment relations, then, teachers occupy an intermediate position as both agents and subjects of specific institutional hierarchies and the social expectations that they represent. The discussion turns to an overview of key factors that characterize education in Aboriginal communities in Canada before exploring the implications of these particular teaching/learning contexts for teachers' work.

The Context for Aboriginal Education in Canada

Aboriginal people, the descendants of Canada's first inhabitants, constitute a relatively small but diverse and significant part of the nation's population. Although Aboriginal people represent less than four percent of Canada's total population, their concentrations range from twelve to sixty-two percent of provincial and territorial populations in the western and northern parts of the nation. With an average age of ten years less than the general population, and higher than average birth rates, it is projected that their share of the population will grow substantially in the near future (Statistics Canada, 1998). The relative youth of the Aboriginal population, especially in those cities and regions where it is most highly concentrated, will have substantial impact on schooling as well as other programs and services for families and youth. In the Prairie province of Saskatchewan, for instance, it is estimated that the proportion of students of Aboriginal ancestry will increase from about one-fifth to one-third of the school-age population before the end of the current decade (Saskatchewan Education, 1991: 5).

It is important to acknowledge that Aboriginal people and their communities encompass highly diverse circumstances. Much of this diversity is grounded in social and cultural heritage – even after an often turbulent history of genocide, cultural absorption, and modernization, there are over 630 First Nations in Canada today and fifty distinct language groups (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Some diversity, including the designation of distinct categories of Aboriginal peoples as First Nation, Métis, and Inuit, "registered Indian," on-reserve, and off-reserve, has a legal and political basis in the *Indian Act*, historical treaties, and other regulatory mechanisms. Additional sources of diversity are produced by such factors as class, gender, regional, and age-based segmentation (Wotherspoon, 2000). Consequently, educators, policy-

makers and analysts must be careful to discard assumptions of homogeneity and single-solution responses in their work with Aboriginal communities.

Overall educational attainment rates among Aboriginal people remain well below those of the general population. In 1996, 54 percent of the Aboriginal population aged fifteen and over had not completed high school (compared to a national rate of 35 percent) while the proportion of the Aboriginal adult population with university degrees or diplomas was about one-third that of the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 1998: 6). Although much of the gap reflects substantially lower rates of school completion by older generations, the likelihood that Aboriginal youth will leave school continues to be about twice that for their non-Aboriginal peers. Even among the cohort aged 20 to 29 years, 45 percent of the Aboriginal population, compared to 17 percent of the non-Aboriginal population, had less than high school education (Statistics Canada, 2000: 97; Gilbert *et al.*, 1993: 23). A recent government audit of the activities of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada suggests that, assuming current rates of improvement in high school completion rates, it will take about twenty-three years before the on-reserve Indian population achieves education parity with the general Canadian population (Auditor General Canada, 2000: 4.44).

The relatively low levels of educational attainment among Aboriginal people have long historical roots. Schooling served prominently as a vehicle for colonization of Aboriginal peoples and devaluation of their cultural and family ties, accounting for some of the alienation from the education system and continuing disaffection held by many Aboriginal people towards mainstream educational institutions and school authorities. Socioeconomic circumstances contribute further to, and are reinforced by, the education gap, as Aboriginal people experience considerably higher than average rates of unemployment, poverty, family disruption, and other forms of social or personal victimization (Satzewich and Wotherspoon, 1993; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Frideres, 1998).

Several initiatives in recent years have begun to target the pressing need for sustained policy responsiveness and institutional action to address these circumstances in a meaningful way. Such actions have been a consequence, in part, of growing public concern for equity, Aboriginal issues, and the social and economic costs that accompany the marginalization of important segments of the current and future labour force. At the same time, various Aboriginal organizations have increased their economic and political presence through various forms of public mobilization and legal challenges. Over the

past two decades, pressure to resolve land claims arising from unsettled or unfulfilled treaty agreements, the emergence of self-government agreements between First Nations and the federal government, and economic development issues involving lands and resources held or claimed by Aboriginal groups have become critical Canadian public policy issues (Wotherspoon, 1999; Cairns, 2000).

These developments are framed within a broader policy context in which considerable uncertainty remains over the direction of Aboriginal affairs. Most Canadians agree that there is a need for faster progress to alleviate pressing Aboriginal concerns related to areas such as land claims, social conditions, unemployment, and education. At the same time, there is considerable public sentiment, often mobilized by opposition political parties, that governments are extending too many special advantages to Aboriginal people, and that First Nations need to manage their own affairs better and must take stronger steps to assimilate into conventional social institutions (see, e.g., Angus Reid Group, 1995; Assembly of First Nations, 2000).

Within this environment, at least two sets of parallel developments in the area of education have emerged since the early 1970s. First, national and local Aboriginal organizations, under the banner of "Indian control of Indian education," have placed schooling at the core of their efforts to implement self-government measures. Band control of local or district schooling jurisdictions, adoption of long-term goals to foster Aboriginal presence in schools and curricula, and the introduction of innovative programs and services extending from kindergarten to the post-secondary level have exploded in diverse forms across Canada. In 1997, for instance, 57.3 percent of Canada's on-reserve registered Indian children at kindergarten, elementary and secondary levels attended one of 446 band-controlled schools, compared to less than one-third a decade earlier and under five percent in 1977 (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1997: 35-37). However, large segments of the Aboriginal population are not eligible for, or not involved in, self-government initiatives. Nearly all other on-reserve registered Indian school students (though a small number remains in private or federally-operated schools) as well as large proportions of those living off-reserve, and Aboriginal children without registered Indian status, attend provincial and territorial schools. A second area of educational reform, then, arises from considerable pressure on those mainstream educational jurisdictions to adopt curricula, staffing policies, services, and programs so as to reflect the involvement of Aboriginal people and acknowledgement of their cultural practices (Calliou, 1999).

A mix of hope and frustration marks schooling for Aboriginal people in both band-controlled and conventional settings. Aboriginal children and adults, in common with other Canadians, place high degrees of faith in the value of formal education as a pathway to social and economic success, and place considerable blame on themselves when they fail to meet the expectations that they or others hold for them. Our own research, consistent with many other research accounts, reveals the high value placed by Aboriginal people on maintaining the ability to "stride between two worlds" (Schissel and Wotherspoon, 1998; Stairs, 1995). They acknowledge the need for skills and knowledge that will allow them to fulfill aspirations to participate and succeed in a rapidly changing global world, but they also seek educational and community experiences that offer them a strong grounding in their cultural heritage and identities as indigenous people. Nonetheless, despite their concurrence with the importance of conventional educational values, they also point to several areas in which education systems let them down. These include the absence of opportunities to learn and speak traditional languages, lack of attention to Aboriginal culture and heritage in curricula and programming, under-representation of Aboriginal personnel throughout the school system and educational administrations, practices and standards that make it difficult for Aboriginal students to sustain interest and succeed in school programs and activities, and overt and covert forms of racial discrimination (Kirkness and Bowman, 1992; Royal Commission on Aboriginal People, 1996; Wotherspoon and Schissel, 2000).

An understanding of the changing social and cultural contexts in which schools operate is critical to analysis of the dynamics of teaching in Aboriginal communities. This means, as well, that the teaching/learning context must be able to take into account such day-to-day concerns as poverty, unemployment, alternative family arrangements, exposure to drug and alcohol abuse, racism, and, in many communities, frequent absence of basic amenities such as adequate housing, running water, sewage and heating.

Schools, often in conjunction with community organizations and other service delivery agencies, have responded to these conditions in a variety of ways. Many schools have introduced services such as hot lunch programs, mentoring, community outreach initiatives, substance abuse counselling, and other initiatives to tackle pressing social concerns. Others have introduced innovative in-school programs such as Native studies curricula, First Nations language instruction, elders' programs, and anti-racist strategies. Several alternative schools adopting a holistic approach to cultural learning

and school-community relations have emerged within both provincial and First Nations jurisdictions. At an opposite extreme, though, several schools have done little to address the concerns of Aboriginal people and their learning needs.

Issues Involved in Teachers' Work in Aboriginal Communities

The general pressures that follow from teachers' constrained professional status are intensified in many Aboriginal communities as a result of a legacy that has led to the combination of mistrust of, and faith in, education's ability to foster opportunities to advance individual and community well-being. To a generation whose parents and grandparents associate schools with failure, humiliation, and abuse, teachers represent an institution often encountered by them as externally imposed, alien and even hostile to their heritage. Paradoxically, teachers also command respect as individuals who are well-situated to facilitate positive social and personal development.

Given the diversity encompassed by Aboriginal communities, teachers frequently are confronted with contending images of the educational needs and objectives of Aboriginal people. Specifically, teachers are central to differing visions and practices associated with the kinds of people Aboriginal learners are expected to become, the kinds of competencies and values they are expected to develop, and the processes by which these objectives are to be fulfilled. These variations are subject to further limitations determined by who is making the decisions regarding educational policies and practices, and what resources and institutional arrangements are available to deliver educational services.

Teachers' roles are highly constrained given the varying demands made on them with respect to both technical and moral/subjective relations. Consistent with expectations observed previously, they must balance sensitivity oriented to provide students with a grounding in their heritage and identities as Aboriginal people along with actions that will facilitate students' ability to develop the educational skills and capacities required for success in a diverse and globally competitive social framework. In all of this, of course, lie distinct views about the relative importance and nature of each component, and competing demands that arise through other aspects of teachers' job performance. Hookimaw-Witt (1998: 169) observes from an Aboriginal perspective that, with respect to these cultural dynamics,

> an evaluation of our cultures as ancient or obsolete is complete nonsense, because our people and their cultures exist in the present. We got here by constantly adopting to changes caused by contact with other cultures. Further, we still define our reality ourselves as much as we are able to develop our own programs and survival skills.... This means that Native education should provide the grounds for finding oneself and the ability to assess critically any help that is offered to us from mainstream culture.

Teachers, additionally, are faced with competing demands to cover an expanding array of general curricular areas at the same time that they must ensure that curricular content and educational processes are relevant to Aboriginal learners and their communities.

The interactions among all of these factors in the actual performance of teachers' work in specific community settings pose important questions about the relationships that exist between teachers' occupational interests and Aboriginal people's educational interests. These relationships are explored below through the impact on teachers' work of issues related to teaching personnel, curriculum and resource support, and Aboriginal educational epistemologies.

Teaching Personnel

One of the most strongly articulated demands from Aboriginal communities is the need to incorporate greater numbers of teachers of Aboriginal ancestry at all levels of education systems. Although no comprehensive data are available, the under-representation of Aboriginal teachers, particularly in elementary and secondary schools has been identified repeatedly as a significant problem by several commentators. In the province of Saskatchewan, for instance (where school boards that have at least five percent of their student populations of Aboriginal ancestry are required to have approved education equity plans and to report on the numbers of students and teachers of Aboriginal ancestry), Aboriginal teachers increased from 4.2 percent to 5.5 percent of the teaching force in the designated districts in the decade between 1989 and 1999, while comparable proportions of Aboriginal students increased from 16.1 percent to 20.4 percent (compiled from Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission, 1999). Nationally, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) has estimated that the Aboriginal teaching force needs to triple in size to come close to a position of parity with the number of non-Aboriginal teachers who work with non-Aboriginal children. Under these circumstances, many school boards are acknowledging the call by Aboriginal communities for greater presence of Aboriginal teachers throughout the school system,

as role models and mentors to Aboriginal students and to serve as cultural liaisons between schools and communities.

Given the reality, even under the most optimistic projections, that it will likely take several years before equitable levels of hiring and retention of Aboriginal teachers can be achieved, more immediate concern lies with the assurance that all teachers have training in cross-cultural learning and demonstrate clear sensitivity to the needs and dynamics of the communities they teach in (Taylor, 1995: 240-241). In this regard, Aboriginal students and their parents express a strong desire for teachers who demonstrate qualities like caring and respect for others, cultural sensitivity, and flexibility, regardless of teachers' or pupils' cultural or racial backgrounds (Stairs, 1995; Schissel and Wotherspoon, 1998).

Among the major concerns that emerge out of the nature and constitution of the teaching force are questions related to where Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers are placed relative to one another, and the kinds of material and personnel resources available to support their work. Teachers of Aboriginal ancestry view several aspects of their teaching experiences in a positive light, but their careers are also marked by problems such as stereotyping and racism, questionning of their credentials, lack of peer and administrative support, and segregation into teaching roles defined by expectations that they are "Aboriginal specialists" (Melnechenko and Horseman, 1998: 29; St. Denis, Bouvier, and Battiste, 1998: 75-76). Hesch (1995: 125) observes the tendency for some Aboriginal teachers to deny their heritage and adopt "raceless" identities as a strategy to comply with expectations about what constitutes a good teacher.

These concerns suggest the potential for fragmentation of identities and roles, sometimes accompanied by conflict, among various segments of the teaching force. Here, racialization may compound existing, unequal gendered divisions of labour. It is significant that teachers in each of these segments tend adopt a prevailing ethos of professionalism, but the specific content of their professional identities and the relative power and advantages that accompany their respective teaching roles are highly variable and unequal. Aboriginal teachers may gain a special status by virtue of their assumed expertise in indigenous cultures and knowledge, but expectations about their Aboriginal ancestry also place them under additional scrutiny both in these cultural roles and with regard to their ability to perform as "regular" teachers. Parallel to what Welsh (1995: 131) terms the "effeminization of morality" requiring women in the home and school to simultaneously guarantee and exemplify high moral standards, Aboriginal

teachers face the dual challenge to meet designated cultural expectations and perform their professional duties in a competent manner. In these regards, teachers, both in their schools and their professional and union organizations, must be cognizant of the ways in which their own actions may lead to occupational divisiveness and fragmentation.

Curricular Issues and Resource Support

Demands to incorporate Aboriginal content and cultural resources into school programs potentially affect the work of all teachers, regardless of their teaching and cultural backgrounds. Teachers must invest additional time and energy to become familiar with and accommodate the introduction of any curriculum and programming changes that affect their working relations. Their willingness and ability to embrace new demands is generally a function of their preparation and philosophical orientations to their work, existing duties and institutional arrangements, and the kinds of material and social support that become available to facilitate successful implementation. As the experience of multicultural education has demonstrated, teachers may resent and resist cross-cultural programming initiatives not because they are opposed to them, but because they see that they are being required to alter their workloads without full consultation and background support (Craig, 1988: 19). More generally, teachers' associations in several Canadian jurisdictions report high levels of stress among their memberships associated with the "overwhelming burden" imposed by the frequency of curricular and organizational changes, increased workloads, inadequate preparation and in-service time, larger class sizes, and lack of meaningful input, communication and cooperation on important educational matters (Council of Ministers of Education Canada, 1996: 14-15).

There is a risk, then, that programming initiatives oriented to the interests of Aboriginal learners could be subverted if they are treated simply as "add-ons" to overextended teaching activities. Many teachers lack sufficient knowledge of and training in Aboriginal content and culture to meet the demands from students and community members for culturally appropriate learning experiences. While the situation is changing through many teacher preparation programs and in-service opportunities, Aboriginal programming tends to be restricted to isolated curricular units or special events in schools that have high proportions of Aboriginal students (Schissel and Wotherspoon, 1998). This problem is often a consequence of limited resources rather

than lack of will. Schools are often unable to offer regular programs in the area of heritage languages, for instance, because they do not have sufficient funding or qualified personnel. In the absence of facilitative resources and support structures, teachers see their workloads increasing while community members remain frustrated at schools' inability to respond to their needs. Consequently, initiatives that hold promise to forge stronger relationships between schools and Aboriginal communities can sometimes have the opposite impact of creating hostility on the part of both teachers and the communities they serve.

This problem is intensified by the reality that there are different jurisdictions involved in the delivery of education to Aboriginal people in Canada. Schools operated by First Nations bands, given their mandate to serve their membership needs, are generally most amenable to the introduction of programming and services specific to Aboriginal communities. However, band-controlled schooling is subject to funding and operational restrictions, determined by the federal government, that can limit the scope and flexibility associated with these programs (Burns, 1998). For teachers, this means that long-term planning is often not possible, that some aspects of programming (like information technology) are well-funded while basic resources in areas like curriculum materials and in-service support are lacking, and that educational priorities are sometimes subordinated to other pressing community concerns. There are also considerable discrepancies in funding, programming, working conditions, and teachers' rights from one community to another.

More fully than in school districts within provincial jurisdictions, the First Nation community political environment can also have a direct impact on schooling. There are strong advantages to having direct connections between schools and communities, but teachers also report (though so far more anecdotally than systematically documented) that community factions, disputes and other localized concerns can leave teachers subject to relatively arbitrary decisions that affect hiring and firing, working conditions, and daily school operations. These issues are related to a situation in which, because they work in distinct jurisdictions, teachers in band schools are not unionized or affiliated with provincial teachers' organizations. Many Aboriginal leaders resist unionization of teachers and other workers because they see it as incompatible with cultural traditions bound in consensus-based collective decision-making. However, public sector employees in some bands have begun to organize, arguing that unionism does not undermine traditional organization and that it is appropriate given their fundamental

rights as workers with specific occupational concerns. Given the sometimes heated arguments and legal challenges that accompany debates surrounding unionism among First Nations, and the perception that their own employment is precarious, many teachers in band schools have so far been reluctant to pursue union affiliation.

Teachers working in provincial (conventional) school systems, by contrast, are typically unionized (most provinces continue to have legislation to enforce mandatory membership in teachers' associations) and regulated by provincial standards that offer at least some consistency across school districts in areas like funding, working conditions, teachers' duties, salaries, and curriculum standards. However, teachers working in conventional schools in Aboriginal communities frequently contend with the reality that the needs and concerns of the Aboriginal learner are superimposed on a curricular framework devoted to competing educational priorities. Consequently, they share many of the same concerns experienced by teachers in band-controlled schooling, including the need for time, resources, and support to ensure that they are able to accommodate responsiveness to Aboriginal learners and communities into already high workloads. Teachers have considerable discretion to meet these needs through the professional autonomy that they have to plan and deliver educational activities within general curricular and institutional frameworks. Nonetheless, effective research, planning and programming are often associated with highly individualized responses that contribute to further intensification of their own work. The frequent refrain that teachers lack planning time and have limited ability to attend meetings with other educators, researchers, and community members, posing impediments to their desire to become more informed about and increasingly active in the development of innovative programming, is especially meaningful in Aboriginal community contexts.

These concerns are especially important as teachers and schools contend with the need to reconcile conventional educational objectives with immediate problems such as racism, hunger, poverty, and violence that many Aboriginal learners are confronted with in their home and community environments. Without sufficient flexibility and support structures, there is a continuing danger that these issues are either ignored, creating daily management problems for classroom teachers, or that they are responded to in an arbitrary or individualized manner, leaving the burden of planning, caring, and service provision with those teachers who are willing to extend themselves beyond their regular duties. Teachers in some communities, for instance, have initiated on a voluntary basis hot meal programs, after-school cultural activities, and home visitation programs.

Although some of these have subsequently received varying degrees of formal support from their school systems, there is more often a danger that standard career structures and divisions of labour within schools and other social service agencies perpetuate practices that leave the needs of both practitioners and community members unsatisfied or worse.

Relationships among Aboriginal and Conventional Approaches to Education

The need for sensitivity to Aboriginal approaches to education poses teachers with one of their strongest challenges, especially in the current political climate. Teaching and learning, within an Aboriginal context, involve integrated, holistic approaches to knowledge, learning, and relations among the learner and his/her social, natural and spiritual environments. Calliou (1999: 181) argues that Aboriginal approaches to education require an "activism" that is "independent, interconnected, community based, local knowledge based, rooted in culture, and grounded in spirituality." Many of these qualities seem to be antithetical to pedagogies and institutional arrangements rooted in bureaucratic, centrally-regulated, secular, universalistic principles that govern conventional school systems. Moreover, a dominant thrust in educational reform highlights demands that teachers' activities be governed by such quantifiable measures of their technical performance as standardized student test scores and prescribed numbers of classroom contact hours, while they are expected to become moral guardians of "virtues" associated with patriarchal, Eurocentric and entrepreneurial orientations to family, work, and society.

Consequently, there is disagreement over the extent to which Aboriginal heritage can and should be encompassed more fully within mainstream education systems. At the extremes lie two contending visions. The first poses a complete separation between systems, with complete autonomy and dismantling of a "white" education system required as the basis to satisfy achievement of the principle of Aboriginal control of Aboriginal education. The second view, advocated especially from the political right, is that Aboriginal students must be prepared to assimilate fully within more rigidly structured conventional educational and social structures. Both of these visions, although for different reasons, carry potential for teaching and education to be totally restructured, de-professionalized and directed in ways that would not always be consistent with teachers' occupational interests.

In this climate, it is perhaps not surprising, then, that with the exception of a small number of alternative schools and educational programs organized around a holistic approach to Aboriginal education, there has been a relatively haphazard and piecemeal approach to schools' implementation of curricula and pedagogies derived from Aboriginal cultural practices. The potential for further reconciliation among Aboriginal and conventional approaches to education contains both risks and promising options for teachers.

The approach most widely espoused by Aboriginal commentators and educators builds upon the benefits that may be derived when conventional education systems are able to embrace Aboriginal knowledge and worldviews more fully through mutual respect for cultural differences and social aspirations (Hampton, 1995). This position challenges educators and officials in conventional institutions to acknowledge the central place of Aboriginal epistemologies in the lives and identities of indigenous people. It also requires significant changes in the ways that schools are organized and in the approaches that teachers adopt in their work. In particular, teachers are challenged to adopt a role that requires them to give up some of their formal authority and autonomy derived from their existing place within educational hierarchies, in order to act more fully as resource persons and facilitators working in close connection with students and the communities they teach in.

The kinds of changes that are envisioned within this approach can be particularly unsettling to teachers who are concerned about ongoing political and administrative initiatives that destabilize and undermine their status, authority and working conditions. In an occupational climate charged with measures and threats to decertify teachers' unions, increase teaching workloads, and demand greater accountability on the part of teachers, there is a danger that the decoupling of teaching from institutional arrangements and practices that provide them with many of their professional advantages will further diminish their job security and working arrangements. Many recent initiatives such as the introduction of citizens' advisory councils, for instance, create additional layers of scrutiny or organizational demands that complicate teachers' work, often without producing substantial improvements in any aspect of educational practice. In addition, as observed earlier, the requirements and expectations associated with new curricula and organizational arrangements often serve to compound teachers' duties and lead to little effective change, especially when sufficient consultation, planning, support, and resources are not provided.

Conversely, the lessons to be learned from recent developments to promote effective relationships among schools and Aboriginal communities have shown promise for a deepening of teachers' professional roles (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Wotherspoon and Schissel, 2000). Schools that are highly regarded by Aboriginal communities and teachers alike in promoting the educational interests of Aboriginal learners are repeatedly described in terms like "communities of support" or sharing/caring environments. Such language can sometimes serve to mask insidious elements of educational changes that otherwise seem progressive. Nonetheless, there are increasing numbers of cases in which teachers, administrators and non-school participants have worked together to address some of the most pressing educational and social concerns within Aboriginal communities. Their success has relied on the promotion of greater flexibility within the programs and services offered by schools, the breaking down of boundaries between schools and the communities they serve, and the diversion of time and resources driven by needs generated within the immediate social context. Consistent with principles inherent in radical educational approaches like feminist and critical pedagogies, teachers in these situations are challenged to share information and decision-making authority with students and community members in order to advance both their own empowerment and that of members of the communities with which they work. This means that the cultural contexts and day-to-day concerns of learners are given a central place in educational programming and activities, integrated with opportunities to allow community members such as Aboriginal elders to be engaged fully as resource persons and educators. Teachers working in these situations recognize that, given the relative autonomy they do have to make important curricular and pedagogical decisions and the strong faith that Aboriginal people maintain in receiving a strong conventional education and formal credentials, their professional roles (in both a technical and moral/subjective sense) may be enhanced rather than undermined when they have sufficient system and community support.

Conclusions

Many of the problems and promises associated with teaching in Aboriginal communities are shared with teaching in other social contexts. Most schoolteachers are confronted with the realities of intensified workloads, intense public scrutiny of their work,

the need to accommodate social and cultural diversity, and the increasing array of social expectations and problems that shape the interactions among school and community environments. However, the educational experiences and interests of Aboriginal people also warrant special attention in important respects. Clearly, given the continuing failure of conventional educational practices to ensure that Canada's Aboriginal people derive equitable benefits from schooling, there is no denying that significant changes be made to the organization and delivery of education. These transformations have significant implications for teachers and their work.

There is potential in all of these developments to alter fundamentally teachers' work in diverging directions. On the one path, teachers may see that they are being required to take on a vast array of new responsibilities that add to already overloaded and under-supported teaching duties. Moreover, they may feel jeopardized since they are likely to be scrutinized for both their adherence to regular curricular expectations and their performance within the expectations of Aboriginal communities. In another direction, however, teachers may derive from their work with Aboriginal learners and community members entirely new working relationships that may allow them to expand the ways in which they conceptualize and practice their roles as workers and as professionals. There is, in all of this, an intrinsic relationship between questions about what kinds of persons Aboriginal people are expected to become, what kinds of workers teachers are expected to become, and who is determining these expectations.

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